

# Inhalant abuse: Nothing to sniff at

By SA Keith Givens  
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**H**uffing, bagging, snoring, glue sniffing; whatever name it goes by, this is inhalant abuse and it's a dangerous practice.

A fad of the 1960s is making a comeback for the youth of the 1990s, including those in the United Kingdom military community.

"Both OSI and (security police office of investigations) have been uncovering information and evidence that suggests area youths are abusing inhalants," said SA Kim Saxon, local Air Force Office of special investigations detachment.

## 17 percent have sniffed

**T**he National Institute of Drug Abuse reports that about 17 percent of American adolescents say they have sniffed inhalants – usually volatile solvents such as spray paint, glue or cigarette lighter fluid – at least once in their lives.

Inhalant abuse has become the stepchild of the war on drugs. It's often viewed as a childhood fad to be equated with youthful experiments with cigarettes. Unlike cocaine,

marijuana and other high-risk drugs, solvents can be cheaply purchased in any store. Model glue, spray paint, butane lighters, gasoline or the propane used for grills are abundantly available and subject to abuse.

## Risks involved

**P**eople inhale solvents to get a momentary "high" or to obtain a feeling of intoxication. But many don't realize the deadly game they're playing. Each time people abuse inhalants, they run the risk of:

❑ Sudden death caused by heartbeat irregularities. This can occur even some considerable time after sniffing solvents.

❑ Death due to asphyxia, especially when large plastic bags are used. The abuser sometimes places his or her head in the bag and increases the risk of death not only from the solvent itself, but also from the plastic bag.

❑ Tissue or organ damage from the toxins in solvents and from the lack of oxygen. Long-term abusers can suffer liver damage and kidney failure.

❑ Vomit entering the air passages. Sniffing volatile solvents can incapacitate the victim sufficiently to prevent his or her re-

flexes from protecting or clearing the throat or air passages. In severe cases, this can lead to death caused by aspirating one's own vomit.

❑ The release of high-pressure gasses in air passages can cause what is known as the "refrigerator effect," which can impact the mouth and throat and lead to reflex cardiac arrest.

## Ratio of deaths is small


**T**he ratio of deaths to non-fatal episodes is relatively small, but the overall death toll is rising due to the sheer number of youth inhaling solvents. Studies have shown that the majority of deaths that result from solvent abuse happen when the abuser is alone.

The bottom line is, however, that whether alone or as a group activity, sniffing any solvent is a deadly game of Russian roulette.

Youth education and parent involvement are the only ways to curb this alarming practice because solvents are part of everyday life. The most important thing parents can do is talk to their children about solvent abuse and the risks involved. Additionally, be aware of solvent-abuse indicators, such as model glue, spray paint cans, butane refill containers, fire extinguishers, and paper and plastic bags.

## Action lines

The Action Line is your direct link to me for complaints, suggestions, or comments. It's not intended to replace the chain of command. When normal command and agency channels haven't been able to resolve your concerns, call (Ext. 2324), fax (Ext. 5367), e-mail (Action\_Line), send through distribution (48 FW/PA), mail (48 FW/PA, Unit 5210 Box 215 APO AE 09464-0215), or hand carry your Action Line to the public affairs office (Bldg. 1085). You may remain anonymous; to receive a reply, leave your name, unit, duty or home phone number, and full APO mailing address. Names are confidential.

  
48th Fighter Wing  
commander



## Gas is available for rental cars

**I have a question regarding the new gas cards. I'm a military member without a vehicle so I don't have a gas card. I rented a car and the AAFES attendants will not allow me to get gas at the gas station unless I have a vehicle registered on base which defeats the purpose of renting a car. Could something be done about this?**

Unfortunately, what you were told is not true. Even if you do not own a car, you can still get a gas certificate issued temporarily by taking the rental agreement to your orderly room. This certificate will only be issued for the duration of the rental agreement. If the member already has a gas certificate for a privately owned vehicle, gas can still be purchased for a rental vehicle by showing the gas certificate and the rental agreement in the sponsor's name. Gas may only be purchased by those who are stationed in the United Kingdom or on temporary official business and authorized tax-free gas. We have notified AAFES of this.



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